

Date: February 24, 2008

Mr. John Catoe
General Manager, WMATA
600 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Catoe:

Trains ran on 30 minute headways Saturday night on the Red Line due to single tracking between Friendship Heights and Dupont Circle. I was on an inbound train last night that was offloaded at Friendship Heights and told to wait for the next train coming in 15 minutes. This is an unacceptable level of service at a busy time for Metro; boardings at Bethesda on Saturday nights are half of what they are in the weekday morning rush hour.

Metro could easily have provided 15 minute headways. The single tracking was caused by switch maintenance at Van Ness. Trains could have single tracked on the blocked track from Friendship Heights to Tenleytown and from Dupont Circle to Cleveland Park and returned on the same track to the switches within 15 minutes. A shuttle on the open track between Tenleytown and Cleveland Park could have met the turned-back trains and made the round trip comfortably within 15 minutes.

It seems that inflexible train control may degrade service in other situations as well. On the New York subway, crowded trains frequently skip stops when another train is directly behind them. Our members have seen this on Metro only rarely in incident recovery situations and almost never during times of simple rush-hour crowding. Skipping stops could significantly alleviate loading delays caused by train overcrowding and prevent following trains from being delayed behind the first crowded train.

It is possible that Metro's automated control system limits the flexibility of train control. If that is the case, Metro should evaluate the merits of more frequent use of operator control during track maintenance, incident recovery, and other times.

At a time when Metro is stressed by increasing ridership, insufficient financial support from Maryland, Virginia, and D.C., and aging infrastructure, everything should be done to provide the best service possible within these limitations.

Sincerely,

Ben Ross
President

cc: Peter Benjamin